

Century, N.Y., 1910-11, LXXXI.  
Billings, A.B.



From the sculpture by Edward C. Potter

ONE OF THE LIONS (IN MARBLE) ON THE MAIN APPROACH  
FROM FIFTH AVENUE

## THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

(CARRÈRE & HASTINGS, ARCHITECTS)

BY JOHN S. BILLINGS

Director of the Library

LIBRARY.  
SURGEON GENERAL'S OFFICE

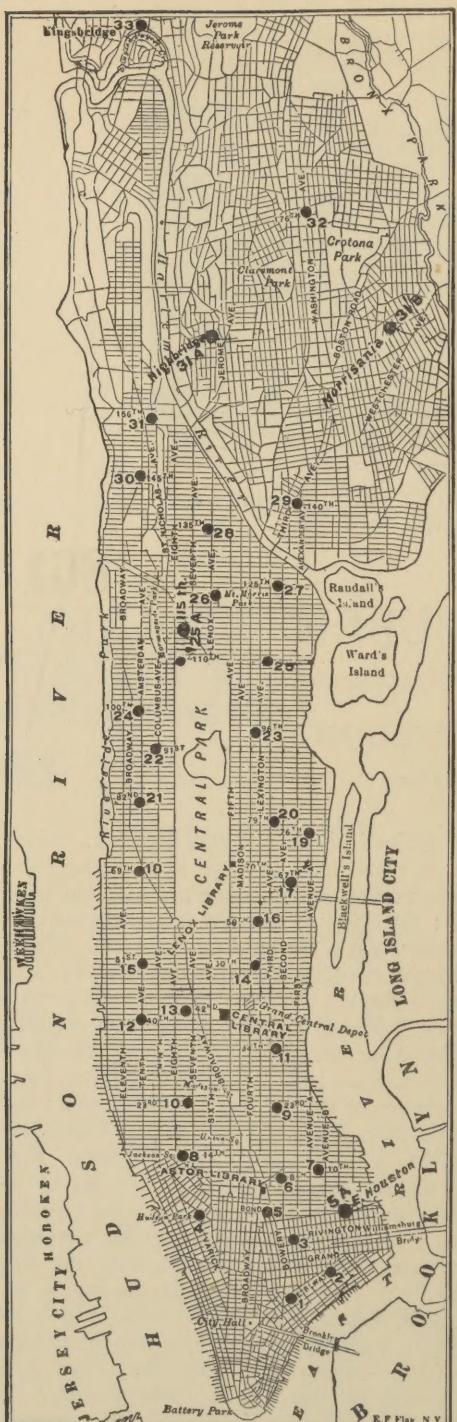
APR 7 1911

THE New York Public Library differs from the great libraries of London, Paris, St. Petersburg, and Washington in that it provides both a library of reference and a system of circulation, and is thus the largest library system in the world, supplying a greater number of readers than any other. In the number of books and pamphlets contained, it is exceeded by the British Museum, the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, the Imperial Library of St. Petersburg, the Library of Congress at Washington, and perhaps one or two others, being in this respect the sixth or seventh in the order of magnitude of the great libraries of the world; but as a system for supplying books to all classes of readers, it is unequalled in size, and is likely to remain so.

It is now fifteen years since the formation of this library system was begun by the consolidation of the Astor and Lenox libraries and the Tilden Trust, the first meeting of the trustees of the new corporation having been held May 27, 1895, at which time the consolidated library

contained about 353,000 volumes. Since that time the following libraries engaged in circulation have been consolidated with it: the New York Free Circulating Library, with eleven branches; the Washington Heights Free Library; the St. Agnes Library; the New York Free Circulating Library for the Blind; the Aguilar Free Library, with four branches; the Harlem Library; the Tottenville Library; the Library of the University Settlement; the Webster Free Library; the Cathedral Free Circulating Library, with five branches; being nearly all of the public libraries exclusively engaged in the circulation of books. In 1902, under the provisions of agreements made with the city of New York and with Mr. Andrew Carnegie, the construction of new branch library buildings was begun, and thirty-two of these have now been completed and opened to the public. The number of Carnegie libraries ultimately to be erected in the boroughs of Manhattan, the Bronx, and Richmond is about sixty.

In the autumn of 1910, the New York



LOCATION OF THE CIRCULATION BRANCHES  
OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY  
INDICATED BY BLACK DOTS

Public Library included in its reference department about 800,000 volumes, 300,000 pamphlets, 100,000 manuscripts, 70,000 prints, two picture-galleries, and a large collection of maps, all being contained in the old Astor and Lenox buildings, and to be transferred to the new building now about completed. It includes, in addition, forty branch libraries for the circulation of books, containing about 780,000 volumes, and circulating over seven millions of volumes per year.

The reference department is mainly for the benefit of scholars and writers, the circulation department for the education and recreation of the great mass of the people, though each does both kinds of work and supplements the other.

The annexed map shows the distribution of the branch libraries of the circulation department in the boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx. Each of them contains from eight to thirty thousand volumes, and supplies a population of from 30,000 to 60,000, being about half a mile from its nearest neighbors. Each has a large room devoted to children and children's books, a small reference-library for adults, and many have a special assembly-room for lectures. All have telephone connection, and interchange books freely to meet the needs of readers.

The new library building on the site of the old reservoir on Fifth Avenue has accommodations for about three million volumes and over seventeen hundred readers. When it is completed, the collections now in the Astor and Lenox buildings will be placed in it, and its reading-rooms will be open to the public every day and evening.

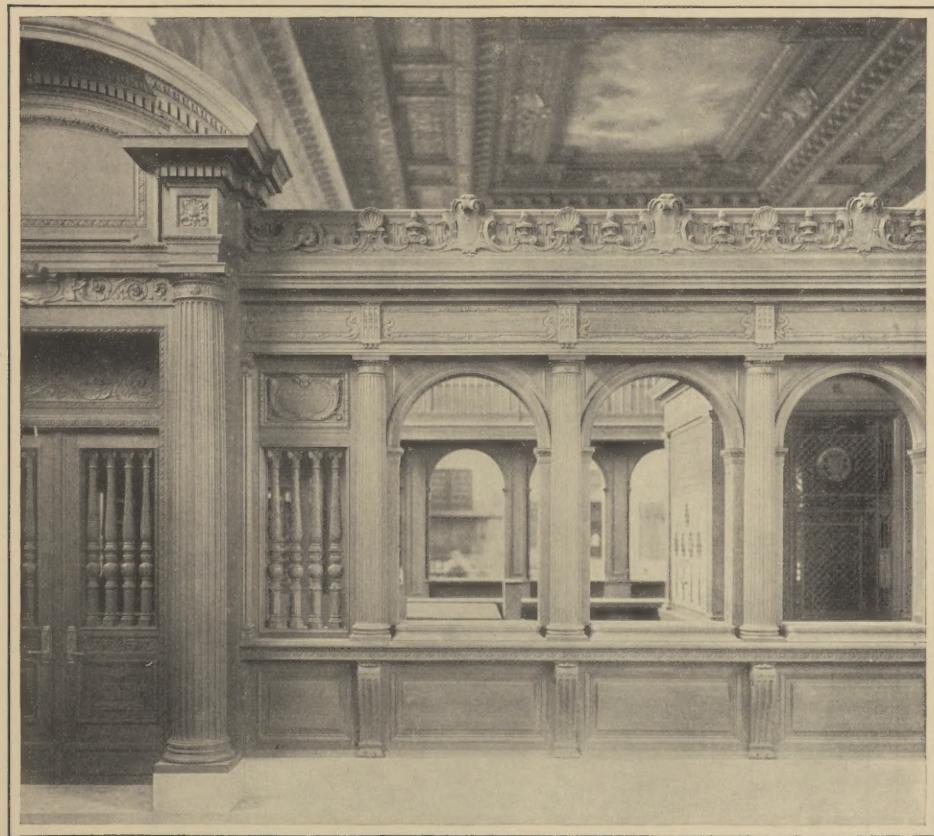
The architects, Carrère & Hastings, have shown that it is possible to supply all the demands of library administration in a building which is a work of art worthy of its site.

It has been planned with special reference to the needs and convenience of several different classes, so that great facilities can be given to the general public and the casual visitor without interfering with those required by scholars and special students in serious research work. The large reading-rooms on the third floor, seating 768 persons and containing about thirty thousand volumes of reference freely accessible on open shelves, the periodical-

room, the newspaper-room, and the exhibition-rooms, are open to every one, while the science, technological, sociological, public documents, Oriental, music, and other special collections, are in rooms devoted to these subjects, to which access will be given by cards corresponding to the alcove privileges formerly given in the Astor Li-

a few small rooms available for the use of single workers.

As the reading-rooms and collections are distributed on three floors of a building 390 feet long and 270 feet wide, it is evident that readers and visitors who wish to use the resources of the library to the best advantage, and with the least delay,



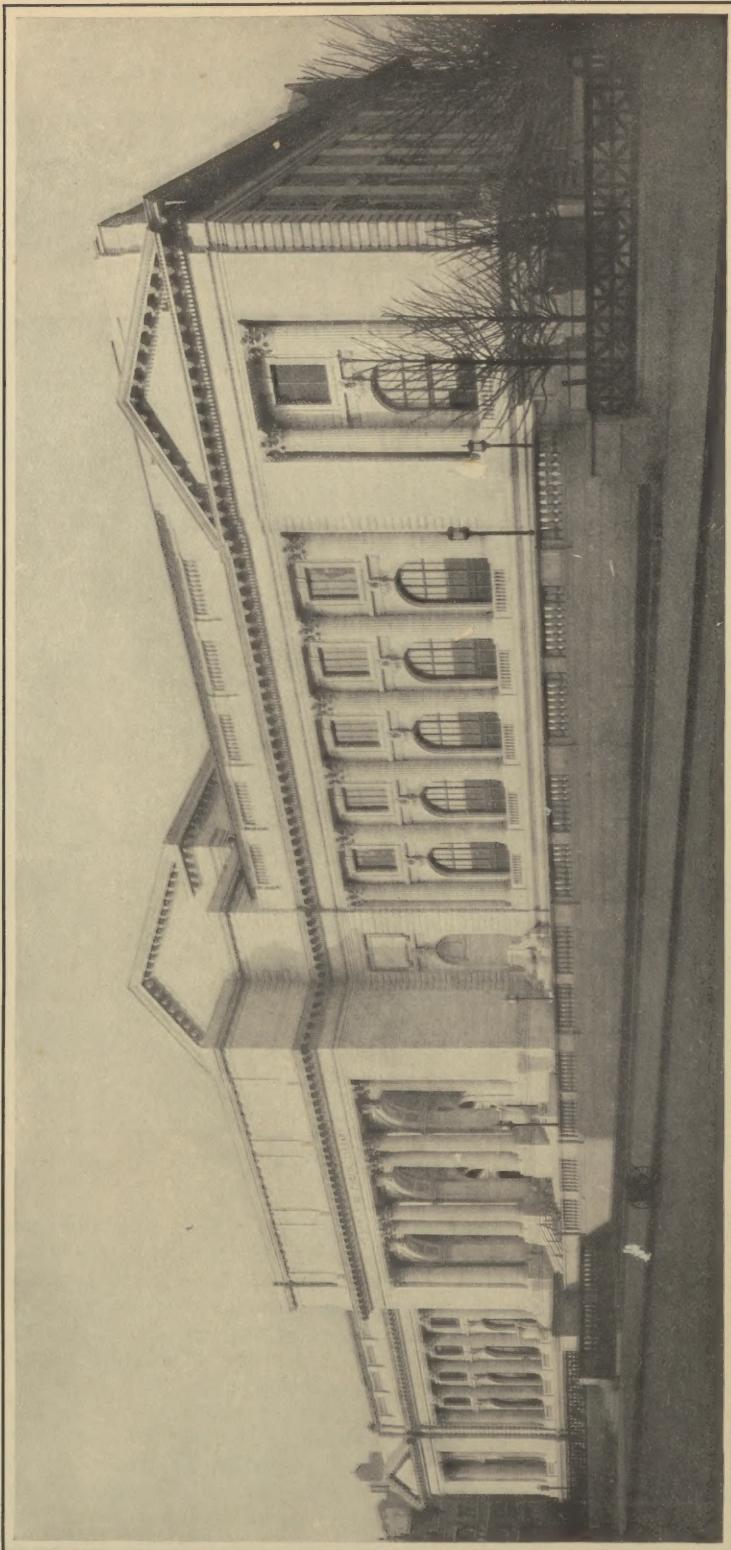
THE SCREEN OF THE MAIN READING-ROOM

brary, but which have been withdrawn for the last few years owing to the overcrowding of the building, and the necessity of filling the alcoves with temporary shelves. Each of these rooms will be virtually a special library containing series of periodicals, monographs, text-books, etc., relating to the special subject, and all freely accessible to the reader holding the admission-card.

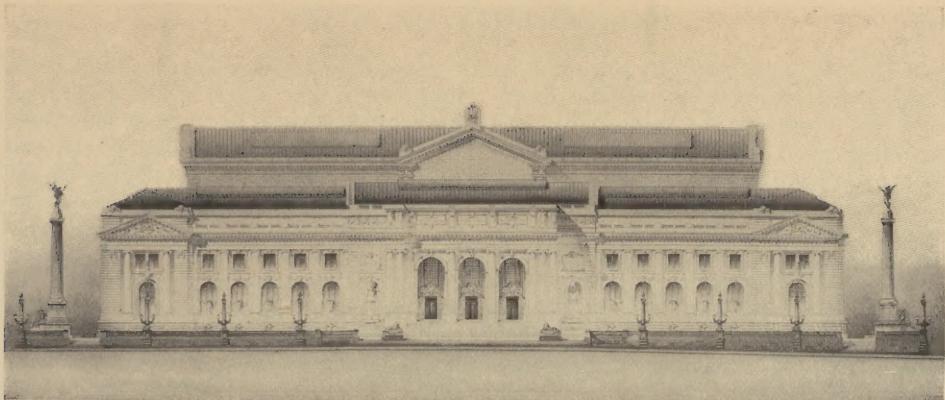
Any one, however, may have brought to him in the general reading-room any book in these special libraries. There are also

should give a little time and attention to learning the location of the works which they desire to consult, and thus make themselves more or less independent of the guides, information-desks, etc., to be provided for the benefit of strangers and casual readers.

A visitor who merely desires a direction, a definition, or a brief summary, such as a good directory, gazetteer, dictionary, or encyclopedia will furnish, will find these in a room on the lower floor directly opposite the Forty-Second Street entrance.



VIEW OF THE MAIN FAÇADE OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, FROM THE EAST SIDE OF FIFTH AVENUE, AT FORTY-SECOND STREET, JANUARY, 1911

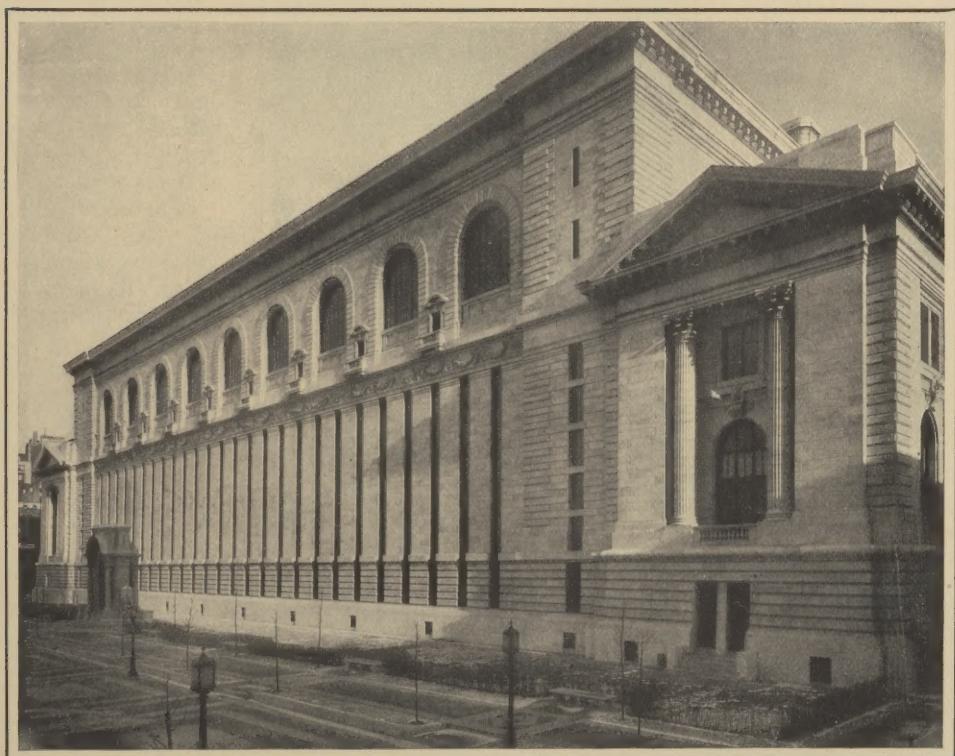


THE ORIGINAL SCHEME FOR THE FIFTH AVENUE FAÇADE (FROM THE COMPETITIVE DRAWING OF THE ARCHITECTS, CARRÈRE & HASTINGS)

The reader who wishes to spend an hour or two in search of something new and interesting, but who has no particular book or subject in mind, will find what is required either in the periodical-room or among the new books, which will be kept

for a short time in a special case in the main reading-room.

The scientific inquirer, the engineer and technologist, the patent attorney, the student of political science and economics, the investigator of early American history, the



VIEW OF THE BRYANT PARK FAÇADE OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, JANUARY, 1911

The long, narrow window spaces are for the lighting of the book stacks, while the arched windows above belong to the main reading-room. At the left of the picture is seen the Bryant Memorial (see page 849) which faces Bryant Park on the medial line of the library.

reader in Jewish history and literature, in Slavonic literature, or in Oriental literature, the musician, the genealogist, and the blind man, will each find a special library for his use contained in a separate room with an attendant. The science rooms, on the northeast corner of the second floor, will contain on opening about fifty thousand volumes and seats for sixty readers. The technological and applied-science rooms, on the main floor immediately below, will contain about sixty thousand volumes. The patent room, on the northwest corner of the main floor, will be much used, and will contain twenty-three thousand volumes and have seats for sixty-four persons. Above this will be the public-documents room, with eighty thousand volumes and seats for thirty readers, and connected with this the room for economics, with twenty thousand volumes and seats for twenty readers.

The special rooms for students in Jewish, Slavonic, and Oriental literature will accommodate from six to thirty-two readers, will have from seven thousand to ten thousand volumes, and will communicate with the main stack, where other collections related to cognate subjects, such as Bibles, are placed.

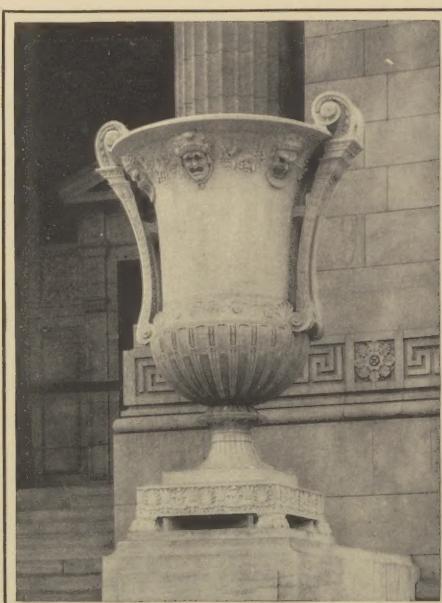
While many special students will find all or nearly all they desire in these special-library rooms, the great majority of readers will find it necessary to learn something of the contents and uses of the central "information and catalogue" room on the third floor, which is an anteroom to the large general reading-room. This room is about eighty feet square, and against its walls will stand cases containing the catalogue of the library, on about two million cards.

Near the middle of the room will be an information-desk, where a skilled librarian with assistants will be ready to help readers to obtain what they desire. In this room will also be the catalogues of the British Museum, the Bibliothèque Nationale, and the Library of Congress, with several hundred volumes of bibliography. It will be a part of the duty of the librarian at the information-desk to show readers how to use the catalogues and bibliographies and how to make out their order-slips, and tell them where to receive the books they call for. Most of them will go to the main reading-rooms adjacent, where they will find about thirty thousand reference-books on open shelves from which they can help themselves, and where any book in the library will be furnished to them from the central delivery-desk.

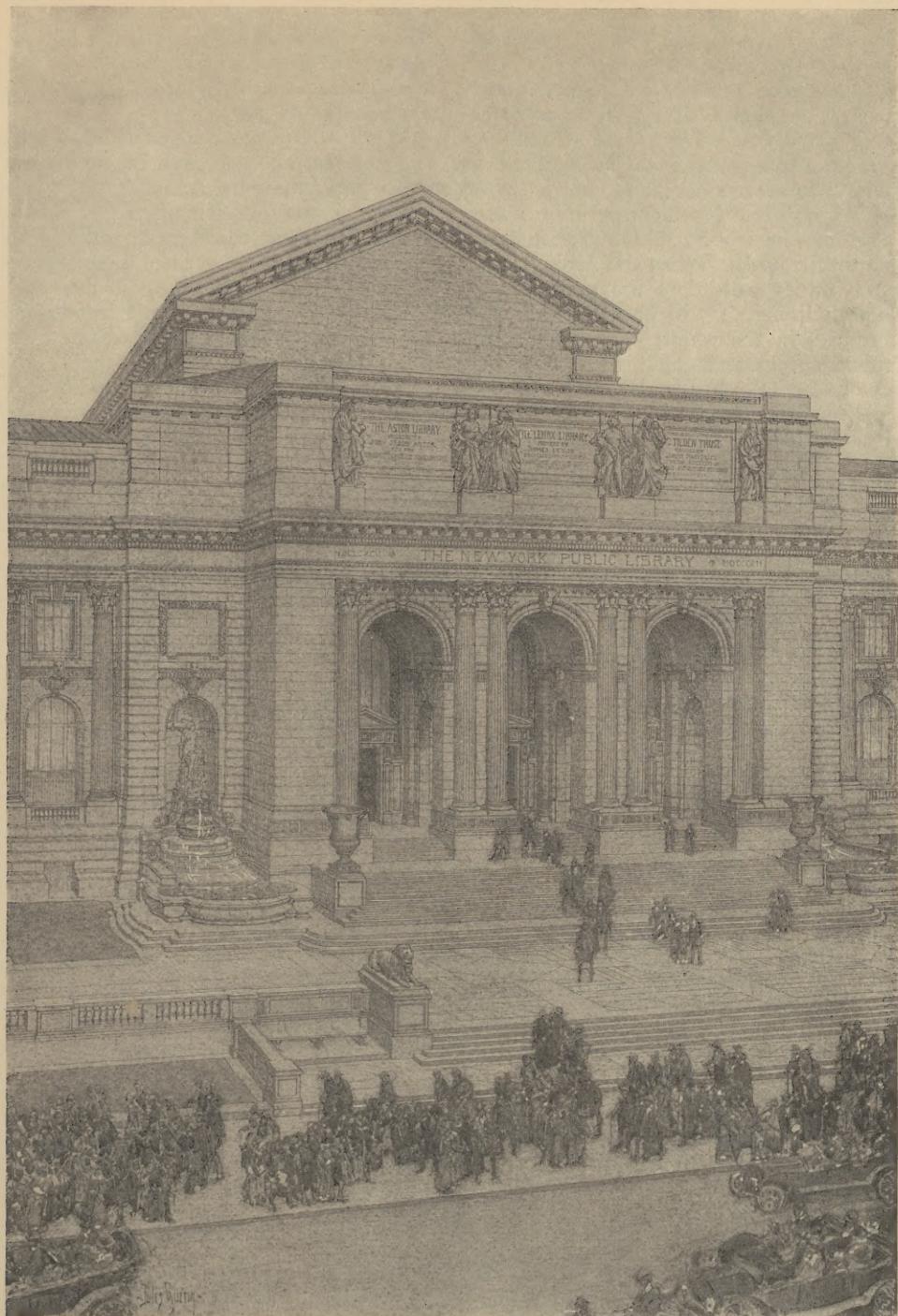
The south side of the building contains the mechanism for supplying heat, light, and mechanical power, and the offices for administrative work. These are

not open to the public, and have a separate entrance on Fortieth Street. The steam and electrical machinery are in the cellar, the printery, bindery, and shipping-room in the basement, the offices of the circulation department, of the superintendent of the building, and of the disbursing officer on the first floor, and the catalogue-rooms, order-room, and director's offices on the second floor. Of the work done in these offices the public sees nothing and can judge only by the results as shown in the manner in which its needs are supplied.

This is not the time or place to give details as to how the library is to be arranged and managed; but of immediate interest to the students of the present gen-



MARBLE VASE—DETAIL OF THE  
PORTICO



Half-tone plate engraved by H. C. Merrill

MAIN APPROACH FROM FIFTH AVENUE AND PORTICO OF THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY (CARRÈRE & HASTINGS, ARCHITECTS)

DRAWN FOR THE CENTURY BY JULES GUÉRIN

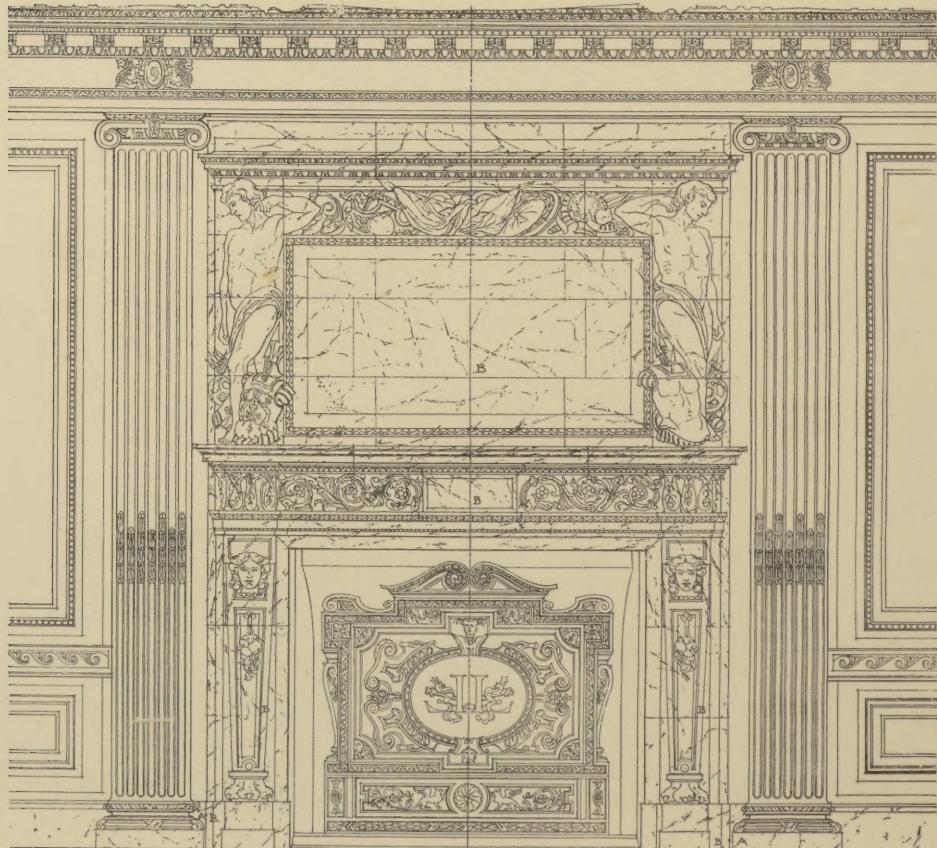
eration are the character and completeness of the collections to be found in it.

The most artistic building, the most perfect mechanical devices, the most elaborate system of catalogues, are of small importance to a reader if the books which he wishes to see are not there; but it should be remembered that the presence of a suitable home has a powerful influence in bringing in the books. When the Astor, Lenox, and Tilden collections are placed in the new building, it will be one of the best libraries in the country for general and miscellaneous work, and, in a few sections, the best of all; but it will need extensive additions to make it what it should be, and it is certain that these additions will be made.

There are very few books of importance to the scholar of which it will not contain

the text in some form, although not always in the first edition, nor in the edition most desirable on account of typography, illustrations, or notes.

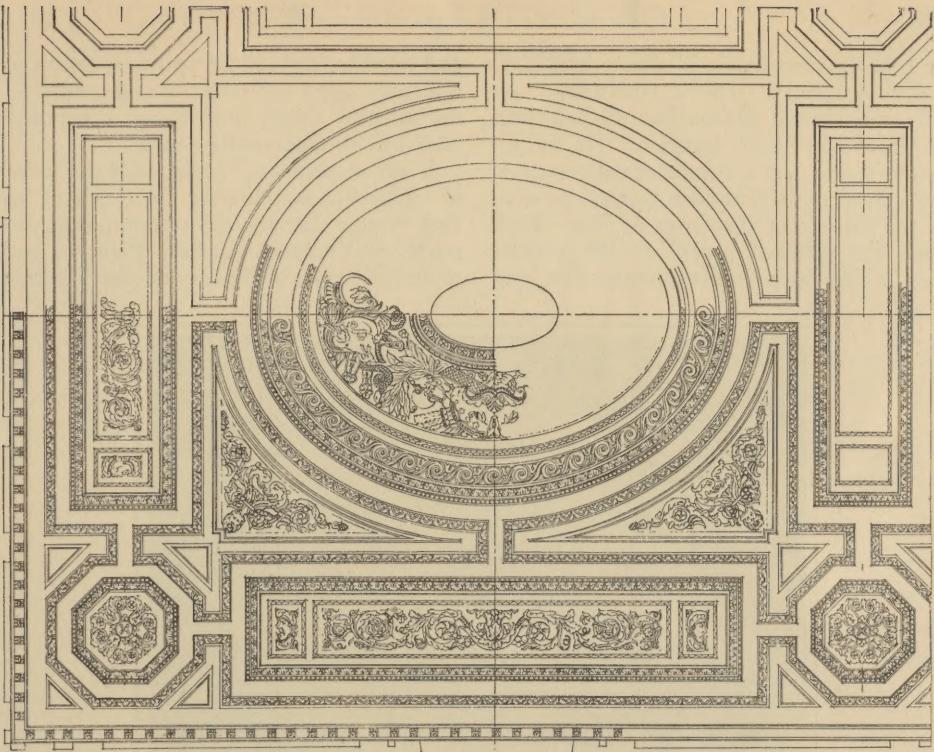
While the demands upon a large general reference-library, and its needs, are much the same everywhere, including the sources, important commentaries, monographs, and summaries new and old in every department of printed literature in all languages, the only library in this country which at present has sufficient means to justify it in making its collections from this point of view is the Library of Congress in Washington. The public libraries of the large cities and universities cannot fully cover the entire field even in the new publications, and must make selections. For each library, subject to the limitations of cost and of space, the choice



From the architects' drawing

#### MARBLE MANTEL IN THE TRUSTEES' ROOM

The Board of Trustees consists of twenty-four members, the officers being: John Bigelow, President; John L. Cadwalader, First Vice-President; Charles Howland Russell, Secretary, and Edward W. Sheldon, Treasurer.



From the architects' drawing

DETAIL OF THE CEILING IN THE TRUSTEES' ROOM

must depend largely upon the demands actually made upon it, the character of the special collections which it already possesses, the resources of other reference-libraries in the city, and the probability of increases by gifts of special collections, or of endowments for special purposes.

The greatest demand upon this library is for periodicals, both new and old, including, under this head, journals, magazines, transactions of societies, and reports of institutions and corporations. The greatest number of calls is for numbers of current periodicals, literary, scientific, philological, historical, artistic, technological, industrial, philosophical, and religious, and this demand is supplied on a large scale, one half of the fund available for the purchase of books being now devoted to this purpose. About seven thousand current periodicals are received, covering all subjects, in all languages, and these are instantly available for the use of students. About one thousand of these are indexed for important papers, the titles of which are copied on cards, with the proper references, and these cards are at once placed

in the public catalogue under the subjects to which they refer. The periodical room in the southeast corner of the main floor of the new library includes a space 120 feet by 40 feet, and will be one of the most attractive features of the building.

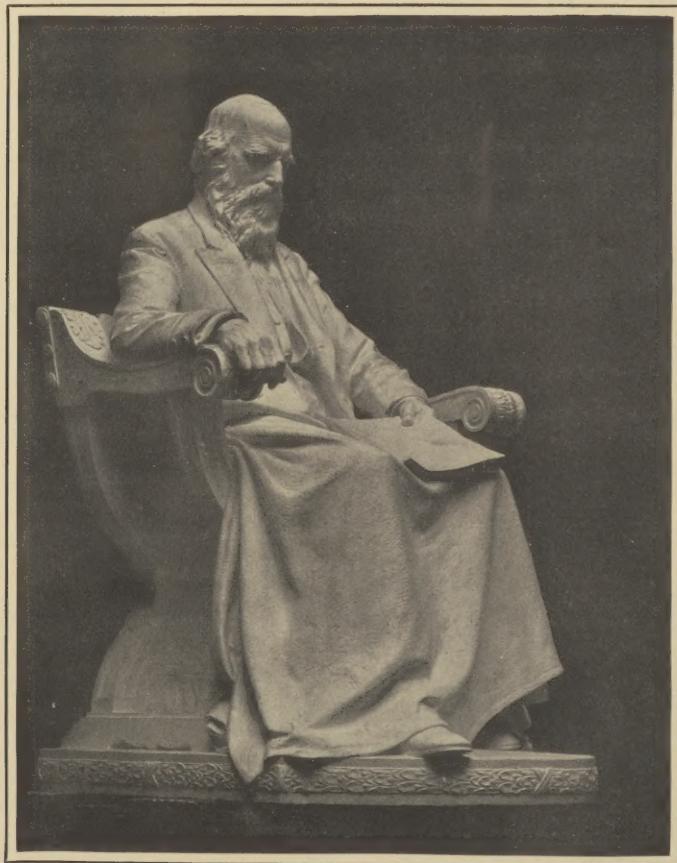
The modern slang phrase, "a back number," to indicate uselessness, does not apply to the files of old periodicals in the library. There are about ninety thousand volumes of these, and they are of the greatest value to students in search of historical data on any subject. In the field of American history the files of old newspapers are of special importance, and of these the library has one of the largest collections in this country. Current newspapers, showing the course of events in all parts of the world, will be supplied in a room 110 by 35 feet in the northwest corner of the basement floor. At present only about fifty important newspapers are subscribed for; but this room will give space for two hundred, which it is hoped will be supplied by a special endowment fund.

The field in which the New York Pub-

lic Library is strongest is history, and especially American history, including not only the United States, but all countries in North and South America. No library in the world has a complete collection of the literature of American history, or even of the history of the State of New York from the colonial period to the present time. The largest collections of this kind

and genealogies, and an extensive series of old newspapers and of State and municipal documents, which are being constantly added to as opportunities offer.

The "Americana" begin with the letter of Columbus announcing the result of his first voyage, include the contemporary reports of Vespucci, Cortés, Pizarro, and their followers, of Smith and the Virginia



HERBERT ADAMS'S STATUE OF WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

are in New York City, Washington, Philadelphia, Boston, Providence, and Cambridge, and in London, but even if all these collections were put together, there would still be some deficiencies to be discovered by the special student.

The materials of the library in this field are not surpassed by any other library, as they include the books and manuscripts of the Lenox, Tilden, George Bancroft, T. A. Emmet, Bailey-Meyers, and Ford collections, a large section of local histories

settlers, of Bradford and Winthrop for New England, the Dutch in New York, and the French in Canada, the original "Jesuit Relations," etc. Special facilities to students in this department will be given in the rooms on the third floor devoted to manuscripts and rare Americana.

In many of the older European libraries the manuscripts are of more interest and importance than the books, and form the special attraction to scholars and historians in all fields of literature. In this coun-



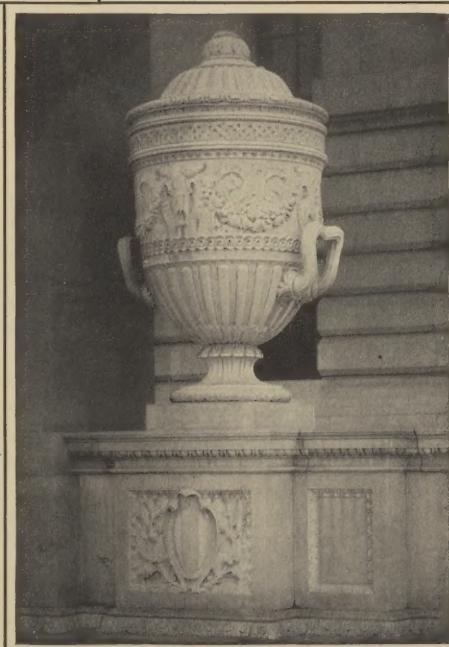
THE BRYANT MEMORIAL, WITH PEDESTAL  
FOR THE BRYANT STATUE

try the manuscript collections of interest relate mainly to local history or to the history of the United States. This library includes about fifteen hundred volumes and fifty thousand separate pieces of this kind, among which may be mentioned one hundred and seventy volumes of Spanish papers relating to Spanish America, seventy-four volumes of transcripts of the loyalist papers, being the applications, memorials, petitions, etc., of the so-called distressed American loyalists, with the reports upon them by the British Commissioners of Inquiry, dating from 1783 to 1790; the Bancroft, Emmet, and Ford collections, and the Gates, Schuyler, and Tilden papers.

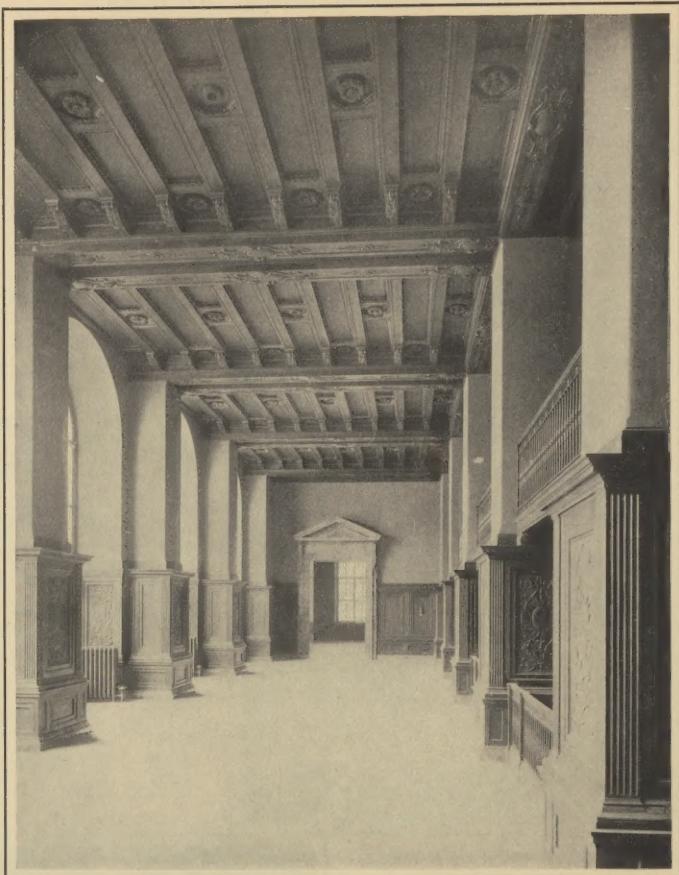
It has also some valuable illuminated manuscripts, such as the lectionary of the Gospels, with miniatures by Giulio Clovio, made for Pope Paul III about 1540 A.D., a lectionary with miniatures and illuminations on purple vellum, about 870 A.D.,

and a few fine specimens of Persian and Arabic manuscripts. It also has a Samaritan Pentateuch of 1232 A.D., and four manuscripts of Wyclif's version of the New Testament in English, dating between 1380 and 1420.

The art department is one of the most important sections of the library, from the educational and historical, as well as from the esthetic, point of view. The rooms on the east front of the upper floor of the new building will be devoted to this department, and will contain the Lenox picture-gallery, the Stuart collection, the print rooms, and the most important works on the history of the fine arts, including the important art books of the Tilden collection. These rooms cover a floor-space of 18,000 square feet, and will be one of the most attractive features of the library to the general



MARBLE URN—DETAIL FOR THE  
BRYANT MEMORIAL



A PART OF THE MAIN PERIODICAL ROOM

public, as well as to artists and art students.

The print department is an important one, and contains the collection of the late Samuel P. Avery, which is specially rich in the works of the French etchers of the second half of the nineteenth century; a valuable collection of Japanese prints, the gift of the late Charles Stewart Smith; and a good collection of the work of American artists. Its treasures will be brought before the public by exhibitions not only in the main building, but also in the branch libraries.

The great reading-rooms will supply the readers in general history, ecclesiastical history, literature, philosophy, etc., and in each of these fields, besides all the standard works, there are many small collections of unusual fullness and interest. The seeker for first editions, ancient and little known poetry and fiction, privately printed

brochures, and curios, will find many things in his line, but possibly not the particular thing that he most wishes, or fears, to see.

The collections of Irish history and literature, of naval history, of dramatic literature, including over twelve hundred prompt-books; of philosophy, folk-lore, and the history of Mormonism, Shakerism, and other sects, are all exceptionally large, and contain some rare and curious pieces.

When the library has a special fund given to it for the purchase of a particular class of books, such, for example, as the fund given by the late Alexander M. Proudfoot for the purchase of works relating to naval history, and the fund given by Mr. Jacob H. Schiff for the purchase of Semitic literature and works relating to Jewish history, of course these are used exclusively for the enlargement of these

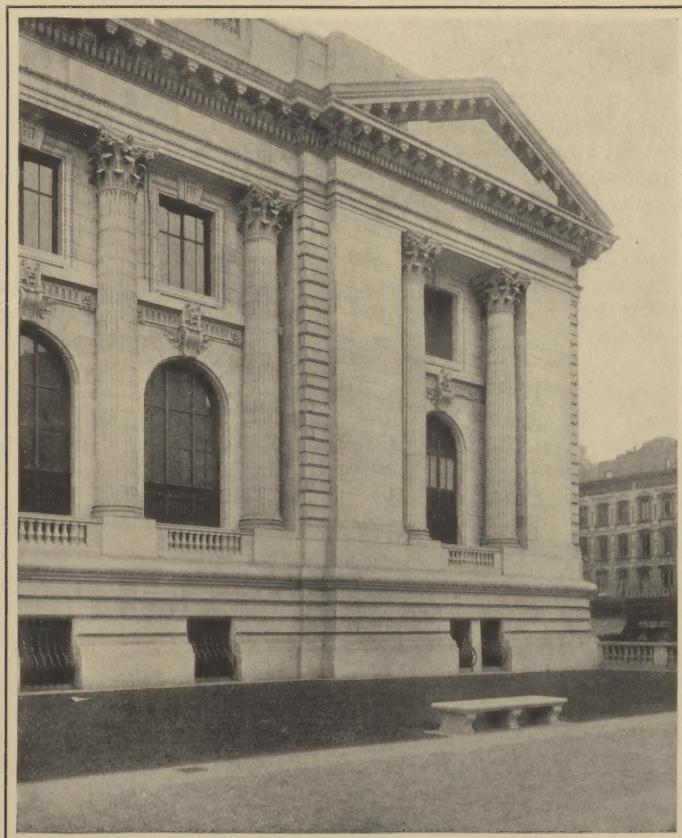
special collections, and in this way a permanent monument to the donor is being constructed, as each book is marked with his name.

New York City being a great commercial center, the demands which its merchants and traders make upon the library are many and varied. As a rule it is the latest information that is wanted, the most recent issues of trade directories and journals of all countries and in all languages. Many of these are costly and bulky, and, for the most part, only of ephemeral interest, becoming obsolete in a year or two at best. On rare occasions back volumes of these publications are called for for historical purposes, but probably no library would be justified in attempting to obtain and preserve all, or even a majority, of them.

At present the library is receiving a fairly good supply of the journals devoted to special trades and industries, and to

commerce and finance in the broader sense of the words; but its supply of trade directories of other countries is very poor, and it is to be hoped that this may be largely increased in the new building. In official statistics of commerce, of State and municipal finance, of railroads, etc., it has one of the best collections in this country, and these must be kept up to date, and made more complete, as opportunity offers.

Virtually within two blocks of the new library building, are three important special libraries, namely, the Library of the Academy of Medicine, the Library of the Association of the Bar, both in Forty-third Street, and the Engineering Library in the new building for the engineering societies on Thirty-ninth Street, erected at the cost of Mr. Andrew Carnegie. The character and management of these libraries will have much influence on the action of the Public Library in collecting books relating to these several specialties. The Library



PAVILION OF THE MAIN FAÇADE (FORTY-SECOND STREET END)

of the Academy of Medicine contains about eighty thousand volumes relating to medicine and the allied sciences, being one of the four largest medical libraries in this country, and is open to the public. This relieves the Public Library of the necessity of doing more for medicine than it is now doing, namely, the taking of a few of the leading medical journals of the world, the occasional purchase of a medical book desired by lay readers, and of a good selection of works on hygiene. The Library of the Association of the Bar contains about fifty thousand volumes, and is one of the best working libraries of its kind in the country. It is not a public library, but a card of admission may be obtained from any member of the Bar Association. Its collection of statutes, session laws, and law reports is a very complete one, and it is strong in international law. Just what and how much the Public Library should do for its law department is an unsettled question and one upon which opinions differ widely. It has a good collection of works on the principles of law, the rights of man, etc., and on constitutional law; also on the history of law, on international law, and on criminal law, but it has little on commercial law, and few modern text-books or monographs. It contains a large amount of source material for the history of law, including an extensive series of the legislative proceedings of all countries and States publishing such documents, but it does not as yet attempt to supply the demands of undergraduate law students.

It is not yet certain whether the engineering societies in the new building on Fortieth Street will undertake to make a complete collection of the literature of engineering, but this library will be accessible to the public, and it is possible that the Public Library can properly lessen its large expenditure in this direction.

The library of the Union Theological Seminary, now in the new building near Columbia University, is a public library, and has a large collection of books relating to theology. Another important special library is that of Spanish literature, formed by Mr. Archer M. Huntington, and established in a separate building under the auspices of the Hispanic Society of

America. Other special collections which are kept in mind in the selection of books for the New York Public Library are the collections on architecture, on botany and zoölogy, and on anarchism, in the Columbia University Library, and those of the New York Historical Society, the American Geographical Society, the Numismatic Society, etc.

The library has a good selection of books and periodicals on all these subjects, and keeps them up to date to meet the wants of general readers, but it does not purchase rare and costly works which are known to be in the special collections above referred to, not from lack of desire to possess them, but because the limited funds available for the purchase of books compels it to make restricted selection.

The most important addition to the convenience of the reading public from the opening of the new library building will be due to the fact that it will be open in the evening and on Sundays and holidays. This will require a large addition to the library staff, and an increase in cost of administration. This fact, together with the great size of the building, and the existence of a number of special libraries set apart in it, will make the cost of administration of the new building nearly double the present expenditure for the Astor and Lenox buildings together. This increased cost must be met from the funds of the library, for such is the agreement with the city, which has erected the building.

If the New York Public Library is to hold its place as one of the six greatest libraries of the world,—not to say improve its position, as it certainly should do,—public-minded citizens interested in its work and in the greatness of their city, must aid its trustees by increasing the means for the purchase of books. The new building will have accommodation for three and a half million volumes, and it ought to possess this number of books within twenty-five years.

There is no library in this country in which special collections of books can be placed, established, or endowed with greater certainty as to their preservation and usefulness, and every such collection will be a lasting monument to its donor or founder.